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Primer makes work safer for F-15 painters

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1/18/2006 - **ROBINS AIR FORCE BASE, Ga. (AFMCNS)** -- Painters can breathe a little easier thanks to the development of a new material used for stripping and painting F-15 Eagles.

The Air Force is continuing its march toward environmentally-friendly mission execution. A partnership with the University of Missouri-Rolla; Air Force Research Lab, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio; Boeing-St. Louis and Deft Industrial Finishes led to the development of the new materials.

Painters previously used chromium primers on the aircraft while wearing bulky protective gear. "However, hexavalent chromium, which makes up the chromate compounds, is a known carcinogen," said John Stephens, aerospace structures engineer, 330th Fighter Sustainment Group.

The new non-chromate materials - corrosion inhibiting primers - perform as well as chromate primers, while being safer for the environment and those who work with them, said Mr. Stephens.

"The biggest plus is that this new primer eliminates toxic waste," said Billy Trussell, F-15 Engineering Structures branch chief "It's easier on the workers because there's no longer a need for heavy equipment."

Paint/depaint shop employees are excited about and satisfied with the change.

"The new primer is environmentally friendly and there is no chance that our people can be exposed to Chromates," said Butch Fowler, F-15 pain depaint unit chief.

Some of the advantages to the new process include an improved appearance, easier field maintenance, the elimination of toxic waste; easier clean up of the stripping facility and reusable plastic media.

Easier to paint also means reducing the time and money required to do the job. That equates to returning the aircraft to service faster - a big plus for the warfighter.

The F-15 Paint Facility began full use of the new product on all Program Depot Maintenance aircraft in September. Full F-15 conversion to the new primer will be accomplished as the aircraft are processed through the six-year PDM cycle. So far 36 aircraft have been painted using the new primer.